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Program Aid No. 368

Superseded by Prog. Aid 592

**THE  
FIGHT  
AGAINST  
THE  
IMPORTED FIRE ANT**



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# THE FIGHT AGAINST THE IMPORTED FIRE ANT



**Imported fire ant mounds.** (Courtesy of State Plant Board of Florida.)

The imported fire ant,<sup>1</sup> a serious pest of people, crops, livestock, and wildlife in the South, is the target of an all-out cooperative, Federal-State eradication program.

Its stings leave boil-like sores on people and animals. It is difficult to hire men to work in heavily infested fields.

This ant damages vegetable crops by sucking juices from the stems of plants and by gnawing holes in roots, stalks, buds, ears, and pods. It injures pasture grasses, cereal and forage crops, nursery stock, and fruit trees.

It often attacks young, unprotected animals such as newborn calves and pigs and the young of ground-nesting birds.

The unsightly, hard-crustured mounds that these insects build disfigure lawns, damage pasture lands, and interfere with the use of agricultural machinery.

USDA Leaflet 350, *The Imported Fire Ant: How To Control It*, describes the development, appearance, and the habits of the imported fire ant and gives recommendations for controlling it.

## ERADICATION PROGRAM

The imported fire ant eradication program began after Congress enacted legislation late in 1957 that authorized the U. S. Department of Agriculture to help interested States, local governments, and property owners fight this ant on more than 20 million infested acres. The cost of the program is being shared by the Federal Government, State and local governments, and urban and rural property owners.

Three coordinated steps are under way: Surveys to find infested areas, treatment of infested areas with insecticides, and quarantines to prevent the spread of the pest from infested to uninfested areas.

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<sup>1</sup> *Solenopsis saevissima* v. *richteri*.





**Ants feeding on okra blossom.**

BX-4100



**Loading a blower with insecticides.**

N-25035

## SURVEYS

The purpose of the surveys is to find out where this pest occurs and how abundant it is.

## INSECTICIDES

The purpose of the treatment phase of the program is to rid infested areas of the imported fire ant and to keep these areas free of it.

Every precaution is taken to apply insecticides in such a way that they will not harm people or animals. They are applied only where an immediate need exists—not on an area-wide basis.

Insecticides in dry granular form are being used in the program. They are more effective than chemical dusts and sprays because they are heavier and more likely to sift through foliage to the ground. Granules are safer for the same reason—they are less likely to stick to foliage, fruits, and berries that livestock and other animals eat.

Granular insecticides are being applied by aircraft, motorized ground machines, and hand applicators. Light aircraft are used to apply materials to large, open areas and to areas that are not easily accessible. Ground equipment—motorized and hand—is used to treat places where more accurate placement of insecticides is necessary.

Property owners who agree to work together as a group to try to suppress this pest quickly on a county or district basis are entitled to receive technical help from Federal and State supervisors when the property is treated. These supervisors map the areas to be treated, supervise application of insecticides, and check results of applications.

Imported fire ant advisory committees functioning at State and county levels organize local participants and work with State and Federal supervisors in planning and carrying out the program.

## QUARANTINES

A Federal quarantine to prevent the artificial spread of the imported fire ant to uninfested areas became effective May 6, 1958. It restricts or prohibits the interstate transportation of the ant and regulates the interstate transportation of articles that may be carriers of the ant in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. Similar State regulations control the transportation of the insect and regulated articles from infested to uninfested locations in these States.

Regulated articles consist principally of—

- Soil, sand and gravel (except washed or processed sand or gravel).

- Plants in or out of containers, if soil is attached. (Plants without soil attached, such as tomato and pepper transplants, strawberry plants, and forest seedlings, are not regulated.)

- Unmanufactured forest products, such as stumpwood or timber, if soil is attached.

- Grass sod.

## HOW YOU CAN COOPERATE

The success of this program depends on your support.

If you are a property owner, you have a personal stake in trying to eradicate these ants as soon as they have been detected on your land. If you delay fighting them, they may become numerous enough to reduce your crop yields, harm your

livestock, and lower the value of your land.

Report imported fire ant infestations to your county agricultural agent or to your State entomologist as soon as possible.

When an eradication program that includes your property has been set up, follow all the protective measures that have been adopted by the Federal Government and your State government.

There are several steps you should take to protect your property from contamination while insecticides are being applied.

- Cover open wells, springs, fishponds, and other open water sources.

- Turn over or cover all water troughs and feed troughs.

- Cover bait boxes, rabbit pens, and entrance boards to bee hives.

- Do not hang laundry outside the house.

If you are a shipper of nursery products or forest products, there are several ways in which you can help prevent the spread of this pest.

- Do not move soil from infested to uninfested areas unless it has been treated.

- Do not ship plants with soil attached unless they have been treated and certified by a Federal or State plant quarantine inspector.

- Consult your local plant quarantine inspector before you move stumpwood with soil attached from infested to uninfested areas.

- Do not move soil or soil-bearing articles from untreated to treated areas.

*Prepared by*

PLANT PEST CONTROL DIVISION  
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